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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000516

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NSC FOR ARBRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO;
OVP FOR J.HANNAH AND R.KARAM;
DEPT PLS PASS TO EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KPAL IS LE SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SINIORA'S NEW VISION FOR HOW THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY CAN HELP LEBANON

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. PM Siniora's chief aide Mohamed Chatah advocates that the international community shift focus from trying to help Lebanon solve its immediate political crisis to a goal of a secure Lebanon based on UNSCR 1701. Based on this conversation and earlier sessions with PM Siniora, we believe this idea originates with Siniora. It tracks with the PM's March 28 address to the nation on the eve of the Arab League Summit. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Charge, accompanied by DCM, met with PM's senior aide Mohamed Chatah on April 14. Discussion began on France's proposal to host a Ministerial-level Friends of Lebanon meeting on margins of April 22 Iraq neighbors meeting in Kuwait but quickly moved to Chatah's recommendation that the international community should, in his words, "shift focus" in its efforts to support Lebanon.

NEW VISION: A SECURE LEBANON

¶3. (C) Instead of trying to broker a solution to the immediate political impasse, Chatah said, the international community should focus on the broader issues of keeping Lebanon secure, based on full implementation of UNSCR 1701. That goal would include demarcation of borders with Syria and Israel, a permanent, secure cease fire with Israel, and resolution of the Shebaa Farms question. Chatah noted that PM Siniora had started presenting this vision in his statesmanlike speech on March 28 in Beirut on the eve of the Arab League Summit that Lebanon did not attend, and developed the theme in his meetings with senior Arab leaders in his trip immediately following the summit (stops included Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Jordan). Chatah said that Siniora has asked the Arab League to take on the Lebanon-Syria question, and it has agreed, but he did not say whether Siniora had success selling his idea of an ad hoc Arab League foreign ministers meeting to discuss the Lebanon-Syria issue.

¶4. (C) Chatah said the GOL does not want to be seen as the initiator of this vision, because of the political opposition's criticisms that Siniora seeks to "internationalize" the Lebanese problem, but would want to participate. He asserted that the Arab League had supported a similar vision in 2006 and he was confident it would do so again. Another advantage of this approach, he argued, is that it would mean the international community is actually

doing something, and not just talking about Lebanon's problems without being able to influence a solution.

¶15. (C) In response to our questions, Chatah said he had not raised this vision with the French, who presumably would organize the agenda for the April 22 Friends of Lebanon meeting. He asserted that in the past, the U.S. has not been seen as supportive of this kind of comprehensive, security-focused approach. Charge commented how, routinely, when the U.S. does not speak in favor of something, some Lebanese observers will assert that the U.S. opposed it. (Note: As of April 15 afternoon, Chatah had not yet heard back from the French. The Charge will see her French counterpart later today and inquire.)

"HANG ON" SAY ARAB BROTHERS

¶16. (C) Discussing the PM's trip, Chatah said Siniora's senior Arab interlocutors (to include the leadership of Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Jordan) had expressed sympathy with Lebanon, unhappiness about the impasse and displeasure with Syrian and Iran, but nothing more. Their message to Lebanon was "hang on", he said. Charge asked in particular about Jordan. Chatah replied that Jordan's message of support to Lebanon had been very clear; stronger than before. He noted that Jordanians were very concerned about Gaza.

¶17. (C) Charge asked how USG could support GOL requests for assistance from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others; Chatah noted Lebanon's continued need for economic support. He said the promised \$1 billion Saudi deposit to the Lebanese central bank had not appeared yet and understood that the PM had telephoned the Saudi Finance Minister about it earlier that

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day.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The idea Chatah explained has some appeal. It would put some international focus on tough issues such as a permanent cease-fire with Israel, or other elements of UNSCR 1701, that are hardly discussed now. And we can understand why Siniora would seek to advance the idea, since he often argues that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a root cause of Lebanon's political problems. But Siniora's vision seems to be based on the Arab League assisting Lebanon to resolve its immediate impasse and the larger international community no longer focusing on that, and results of the Arab League efforts so far have been next-to-nil. End Comment.

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